



-POSSIBLE UTOPIAS

THE
WORDSFEET
ECO-ZINE
SUPPLEMENT

Original Introduction:

Welcome to WordsFestZine, a publication born out of a partnership among Words, Poetry London, Western University, and Insomniac Press. Our goal this year was to incite writing that mapped new ways of thinking, new ways of being, and, most importantly, new ways of imagining the future into which we are stepping at this decisive moment in history. Our call was simple: we asked for works of prose, poetry, creative nonfiction, art, and hybrid work that charted the possibilities of the present and the multiple futures branching out of it, for works that imagined new utopias.

We have divided the WordsFestZine into three sections: “Pastorals and Post-Pastorals,” “Breathless but Hopeful,” and “Unrealized Futures.” “Pastorals and Post-Pastorals” contains work that grapples with the beauty of this passing moment and looks towards “the new forms of beauty that are emerging from it. Breathless but Hopeful” contains work that makes room for the possibility of hope among the multiplying tragedies of the world. And “Unrealized Futures” contains work that turns towards futures that are variably impossible, triumphant, terrifying and inevitable.

Supplement Introduction:

Welcome to the Possible Utopias Part 2. We were so thrilled with last year's WordsFest Zine, we decided to re-open submissions and make a supplemental edition. Words teamed up with The Write Place at King's University College and hosted a two-part zine Talk'n'Shop with Jenna Rose Sands and Tom Cull. We invited participants to submit artistic visions of possible utopias; we are proud to share with you works by eight new writers that conjure future worlds.

Cover artwork: Ben O'Neil

Acknowledgements:

An ambitious project of this nature could not have happened without a lot of coordinating efforts. WordsFestZine would like to thank all of the WordsFest organizers, and in particular, Josh Lambier, of the Public Humanities Program at Western, and Brian Meehan, of Museum London.

We would also like to thank Kathleen Fraser, of Western's English and Writing Studies, for facilitating student and faculty involvement in this project; and the many energetic and dedicated WordsFestZine volunteers.

We are grateful for the many sponsors of Words, including the London Arts Council, who make the festival possible.

Finally, to all of those who submitted their creative works for this Zine: thank you!

The Wordsfest Eco-Zine Supplement is produced on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Attawandaron (Neutral), and Wendat peoples, and publishes writers from across Turtle Island.

Publisher:

Tom Cull

Managing Editor:

Aaron Schneider

WordsFest Zine, 520 Princess Ave., London, ON, N6B 2B8, www.wordsfestzine.com

Copyright of each contribution is held by the contributors and cannot be reproduced without their permission.



Contents:

Mackenzie Emberley: “Blight”	1
Penn Kemp: “What Matters”	1
Zahra Musa: “Mother Nature’s Revenge”	2
Lilly Cereghini: “Let the Sun Shine Down”	2
Lisa Kovac: “Little Red Riding Hood and Her Grandmother	4
Penn Kemp: “Study in Anticipation”	4
Cassy Player: “I Found My Unicorn in 2021”	5
Jake Walker: “Untitled”	6
Anusha Rung: “Wooly Lawnmowers”	8
Penn Kemp: “Hope the Thing”	8

Blight

By Mackenzie Emberley

Can you tell me where it hurts?

You ask the question, but I don't know where to begin because it's everywhere. My lungs, my skin, my heart; it's all infected, I'm sure.

Describe your symptoms for me.

All right, let me describe for you the ache I feel in my chest when I breathe, how every inhale fills my lungs with smoke. Do you know what it's like trying to convert gasoline into oxygen? The thick smog crawls down my throat, causing my chest to heave.

Why do my crimson rivers have nothing to fill them but waste? While my red cells should carry life, all my organs receive is poison. My body of streams and pools, while not administered with blood as I need, is inundated with garbage that has been force-fed to me. Waves of nausea and chemicals wash over me, leaving my skin dry and uninhabitable.

What else can you tell me?

Oh, you'd like me to keep going while my mind is racked with fever dreams? No, it's not a dream. The fever is real and intense. My skin is slick with sweat, flooding every crevice of my land.

Does it hurt when I push here?

Does it hurt when you press your hand down onto my exposed ribs? Of course, it does! I have no more fat or muscle to protect myself because these parasites have eaten everything. They've excavated my bones looking for gold. They've shaved my foliage to make room for themselves. They've multiplied their masses, consuming the nutrients that were meant for me.

I'd like to keep you here overnight for observation.

Okay, you sit back and observe as the native cells of my body go extinct because of an invasive species that has made my flesh its home.

Only when my heart rate is plummeting off the cliff

What Matters

By Penn Kemp

I enter the garden, its ground still held by winter, spring almost released. I stand at the centre into which all flow, from which all emerge.

Wind in the upper birch stills. The garden's breath so long it is immeasurable. But I wait, offering awareness as witness.

Pivoting, I pray

Pivoting, I pray. North, grant us your clarity and strength. West, your surrender and acceptance. South, your joy and creativity.

East, your initiation, inspiration. Sky, your broad view. Earth, your ground, your holy round.

The moment is held in a bowl beyond comprehension, beyond belief. May we carry balance lightly on each step of the way

till it recurs six months off. May we find a way to become whole. May the earth find her stability.

May the equanimity of Equinox be yours, be ours, be hers all ways.

of my collarbone, and you risk losing something too, do you start the treatment. You've read somewhere that the colour green relieves homesickness – and boy, is your home sick – so that's what you try.

Sure, you keep an eye on my vitals, but next to you a nurse is refilling my IV fluids in a plastic bag, after plastic bag, after plastic bag.

Mother Nature's Revenge

after Alexis Brockman: Bronx Zoo

By Zahra Musa

Children run around not listening to their parents.
Grizzly bears splashing around their makeshift forest enclosures.

Snow Leopards move sluggishly.

Their faces show years of abuse.

Everyday is the same,
for these tyrannized animals.

Nature knows the abuse of zoos,
of displays for pleasure.

Of animals no longer wild.

BOOM

A blast of orange goes, and the Bronx Zoo soon becomes a warzone.

A once industrialized world,
is now a place of nature and beauty again.
Mother Nature has finally gotten her revenge on humanity.

A single **BOOM** made the world become dark.

The next second it was bright again.

In every direction,

Maple and Evergreen trees can be seen.

Mother Nature has resurrected the once extinct animals.

Brilliant yellow sunflowers and marigolds on every corner.

Roads that were paved with asphalt,
are now overrun with grass and weeds.

All animals within zoos can finally be free
and get a taste of the outside world.

Humans however...

Not a single one in sight.

Every single one,
vanished in a blink of an eye.

Earth is no longer a man's world.

The animal kingdom has left mankind behind.

that has made my flesh its home.

Only when my heart rate is plummeting off the cliff of my collarbone, and you risk losing something too, do you start the treatment. You've read somewhere that the colour green relieves

Of animals no longer wild

homesickness – and boy, is your home sick – so that's what you try.

Sure, you keep an eye on my vitals, but next to you a nurse is refilling my IV fluids in a plastic bag, after plastic bag, after plastic bag.

Let the Sun Shine Down

By Lilly Cereghini

"Hey!" crows a familiar voice. I see Jeremy coming towards us, dressed in tight black clothes and a purple birthday crown he must have gotten from one of the many kids milling around us. I'm uncomfortable seeing him in such revealing clothing, but he explains quickly.

"When it gets dark on an eighteen-year-old's birthday," he says, "the new adult has to jump over fire as people

make it bigger, and only stops when they get burned.”

“What?” Adam and I exclaim together.

“Oh wait, it’s before they get burned. Right. You know what they do want, though?” he asks, grinning sidelong at me.

“What...?” I ask suspiciously.

“A virgin sacrifice to the ancestors at midnight.”

This time, we all laugh, but Jeremy says seriously, “No really, it’s a Seminole tradition going back twenty billion years.”

“The planet hasn’t been here that long, brainless,” retorts Adam.

“Oh yeah...”

But Jeremy hears his name and has to go off. I wheel Adam into the bedlam, because he can’t wheel himself over such uneven ground.

Suddenly, we’re beset by two enormous men, who are identical down to the last hair. I’ve never met Jeremy’s brothers, but he’s described them, and I assume this is them.

“Jerry’s got a girlfriend,” they singsong together. Yep. Definitely Jeremy’s brothers.

“Hi,” I say, trying to hide my embarrassment. “I’m Victoria. This is my brother Adam.” Adam, who, by the way, has his eyes down. I guess I can’t blame him: next to these two giants, how small must he feel looking up from his wheelchair? It’s the first social event he’s attended since his accident.

“We know,” one of them says. “Jerry’s happy you’re both here.”

the bedlam

“Want something to eat?” the other asks.

“Sure, please,” mumbles Adam, and I nod, too. I wheel him over to a free table, and we grab paper plates, which the twins load down with food.

Adam finally smiles, thrilled at the spread, and we stuff ourselves. I look around as I eat, trying to make sense of this crowd. Almost everyone is non-white. How can this many different kinds of people get along? It must be the food, and the weather, and the occasion. I look around for Jeremy, who I spot greeting guests. You never saw a more vivacious host: he hugs people, shakes hands, kisses both men and women, gives piggy-back rides to the smaller kids. You can

just hear their laughter from here.

“Vicky’s got a boyfriend,” Adam singsongs, and I can’t deny it: I like Jeremy, this heartbeat centre of the strange and beautiful world we’re in here. It’s strange because it’s beautiful, and beautiful because it’s strange. I never thought that people, just people together, could look like this. What had I been missing behind the bars of our old gated community? Jeremy catches my eye, and I know he sees it too: the beauty of humanity in its wide spectrum, and him, this brown man I mustn’t, but do, love.

Little Red Riding Hood and Her Grandmother

By Lisa Kovac

There was once a girl named Little Red Riding Hood who often went to visit her grandmother's cottage in the woods. One day, on her way there, she met a wolf.

"Good morning," it said. "Where are you off to today?"

"I'm not supposed to talk to strangers," said Little Red Riding Hood, "but I've known you for five whole seconds now, so maybe it's alright to tell you. I'm going to Grandmother's. She lives all by herself, and she doesn't get to town much these days. So I'm bringing her some groceries."

"How about I come, too?" said the wolf. "I'll go the short way and you go the long way."

"Alright," said Little Red Riding Hood. The wolf bounded off.

Study in Anticipation

By Penn Kemp

To quote Marguerite Duras: “one must try to move from dismal despair

to joyful despair.” We try to clinch such disparity as better than *dismal hope*—

or the almost impossible delight in remembering Hannah Arendt’s line:

“Even in the darkest of times we have the right to expect some illumination.”

Poems come more slowly now. Or is it that we discriminate? Whatever, we’ll

weather through another winter, glad to hibernate, home, nodding to one another.

The poet beholds and is beholden, cleaves and is cleft, leaves and is left.

Culture shock is not in the journey but on returning to what we believe is haven

even if only in temporary respite, a station on standby, where we rest in spite of fear.

We began with a flicker of what could only be hope, and shifted to the cardinal

sign that beckoned us on to another year, beyond what we thought would be clarity

of vision in 20/20. But now we see through the mirror to the other side of expectation—

Utopia, the word Thomas More coined from the Greek for ‘no place’. And yet we trust.

the beauty of humanity in its wide spectrum

When he reached Grandmother's, he found no one home. On the table, there was a note explaining that Grandmother might be late and Little Red Riding Hood should make herself comfortable. The wolf ate the note and jumped into bed. Minutes later, Little Red Riding Hood arrived.

"Come in, my dear," said the wolf in his best impression of a very old, quavering, human woman.

Well, that's that taken care of

"You sound sick, Grandmother," said Little Red Riding Hood. "Really sick. Not like yourself at all."

"I'm very sick," said the wolf, trying to speak in a higher, less growly register.

"And, Grandmother, what big ears you have!" said Little Red Riding Hood, approaching the bed. "And they're furry! What kind of sickness do you have?"

I Found My Unicorn in 2021 **By Cassy Player**

when I filled a large cardboard box
to the top with glitter and
turned it upside down
to watch the tiny spectacles flutter
deep into every crevice of my living room carpet.

Because
my world exploded with sparkles and rainbows
the moment
I
realized
I had ADHD at
31 years old.

#covidgavemeasecondchance
#thankfulforbeinglockeddownwithmytwoyearold

"The better to hear you with, my dear," said the wolf inanely. "It's a very strange sickness that makes everything swell up and grow fur."

"I'll say! And what big eyes you have! Their colour's changed, too. And what big nails! Your whole hands are huge. And Grandmother," she said, in an especially loud voice, "what big teeth you have!"

The wolf began to stretch slowly and paused for dramatic effect.

"All the better to --"

The wardrobe door suddenly opened, and Grandmother jumped out brandishing her axe. She sprang nimbly to the bed and chopped off

**my
world
exploded
with
sparkles
and
rainbows**

the wolf's head before he could finish his speech.

"Well, that's that taken care of," Grandmother said briskly, wiping her axe on the rest of the already-spoiled bedspread. "That's the last time he'll eat one of my goats. Why couldn't he just go to the butcher-shop in town, like a reason-

able talking wolf? Anyway, thank you for luring him here, dear. That was some good acting."

"Welcome," said Little Red Riding Hood, looking away. "That was disgusting, but impressive."

"Well," said
Grandmother
with smug
satisfaction,

and their minds can be as sharp as their axes

"when you
live all by yourself in the middle of the woods, there are some things you just have to know
how to do."

The moral of this story, children, is: your grandparents may not be as fragile as you think, and their minds can be as sharp as their axes.

**The trees sing through me
They tell me it is time**

Untitled
By Jade Walker

Diesel clouds
Where the adders roam
Diesel clouds are terrorizing my home

Anything to achieve his means
And all I smell is gasoline

By the riverbank
Waywardly
I'll softly lay me down to sleep

With my arms and legs all bare
Spiders weaving in my hair

Diesel clouds
Where the adders roam
Diesel clouds are terrorizing my home

Anything to achieve his means

And all I smell is gasoline

~X~

The land has created me
To end all of mankind
The trees sing through me
They tell me it is time

For revenge to be stricken upon you
By the two swords they form in my hands
A lonely forest witch I am
Bringing justice to the land

Inner spirit within me
Brimming and spilling over the edge
My blood is bubbling; my tongue is dagger
sharp and pointed
My voice is back and it can move mountains
My voice is back and it can reshape all of your
ends

Find the means to your ends

The land speaks through me and it says
You are not men
You are not men

You may call yourselves men
But you are not men
You are so much lesser than
You are so much lesser than

Mankind is an abomination
Burning the Earth
Slaughtering the animals needlessly
Raping women and the land

For your own amusement
For your own gratification
For your own pleasure
For your own enjoyment

No more
No more

I shall beseech again
I will stand strong and tall to cleave them

As Mother Nature's loyal shield maiden
As Mother Nature's loyal shield maiden

~X~

The more people I meet
The more I befriend trees
Hear them sway, moan and creak
Down in Fox Hollow Ravine

Whimsical wiles beguile
Clandestine corpses pile
So many stories and lies left untold
Take me back to the place you bore me
I'm in a forest of blood
Old, dead and owned

So serene
And peaceful to me
The forest is my home
The only home I've ever known

Preparing for the hunt
It's man flesh that I'll be cooking
The more people I meet the more I like my
cunt

I'm a botanical freak
Proud to be meek
I feel the cool healing moss on me
As my wounds seep
Nature is the language I speak
~X~

You set me on fire
Pollute me
Spit on me
Rape me
Litter me

I've felt raped my whole life
Even when I was young
Too young to even know what it was
I've felt raped
My whole life
My entire childhood

Even in my youth
I was always struggling to understand the
truth
The irony makes me sick
It makes me feel like I'm going to puke
Just like when I first started seeing you

Fire destroys everything it comes in contact
with
Fire destroys everything it touches
Fire destroys everything it comes in contact
with
Fire destroys everything it touches

Fire destroys everything it touches

Woolly Lawnmowers

By Anusha Rung

Sheep have taken over the city's cookie-cutter fields
Sheep of all shapes and sizes
Curly sheep black sheep beige sheep brown sheep russet-and-cream sheep fat sheep with stick-thin legs thin sheep with bald necks
Horned rams horned ewes
Bluefaced border Karakul
Sheep with shaggy backs that cannot be combed clean
Sheep that swing their hips as they walk
Sheep that came from nowhere and built a
 life for themselves here
Without even trying to
Sheep that do not remember their ancestors
But stare at you with relentless innocence
Not questioning their place in the world
Unironic sheep that never learned to worship
 anything
And do not know they are sacred
Harmless predators
More powerful than lions
Because lions are extinct
And sheep have replaced lawnmowers
Just by existing they save us
Without being implored
Sometimes the lambs break into a run
Making for the street
Instinctively we herd them back
To an imaginary safety
Even though there are no more wolves, no more
 cars, and no one eats meat
The apocalypse has come and gone
Clichés have been gutted and turned inside out
Dogs and cats and weasels live safely in houses
Pandas are back in the forest
Shark fins are left alone
And sheep rule the world
Their reputation
As rebellious artists
At last restored

*Inspired by my volunteer work with woolly
lawnmowers at Maisonneuve Park (Montreal)*

Harmless predators

More powerful than lions

Hope the Thing

By Penn Kemp

Of course, Pandora looked, what human
wouldn't? All good flew out, soared into
the aether beyond hope. Evil and illness,

disease and nastiness, weighing heavily,
slumped out, low fog clinging to ground,
a miasmas of lost Hope, forlorn *Elpis*.

Though the jar was quickly capped, *Elpis*
was locked inside, leaving us no
Hope or all, perhaps. Who can tell?

*

What if that jar reclaimed wings, white
wings? What if it flapped upright till
it could rise heavily into blue, circling on

air currents ever higher out of
sight? Not out of mind. Horus,
move aside, roll over.

After all, Hope is caught

in the honey jar and we all know
hope can fly like

expectation out
the window, the fastest
Hawk in heaven, away.

*

Whatever happened to Pandora herself
and to the empty box? Would Hope
refill itself with time, given hope,

Inside, the space of the empty jar
offers miracles of new unknowns
and the jar expands to breaking

point. What does it need with
sides? Or pointers? No point
when we are not on edge.

*

Hope trills unceasingly until
our last breath, until we
stop. Then hope

lands somewhere else,
perpetual motion, e-
motion.

Hope arrives, unexpected
again, and we receive the full
embrace of “The Receptive”.

*

Never has this unabashed
little bird of breath ever
asked a crumb from me.

The root of all action inner and
outer, begins here, breathing in.
After a pause where all is potential,

we receive the space
created with each
exhalation.

*

Allowing the jar to burst
into shards of nothing,
something or everything,

why not? This kind
of centred expansion whelmed in
love, neither over nor

under, flowing, fluent, fast
influenced, to be under stars’
protection if we choose to

hear their light,
their light twinkle little
little so near and so far

so good. So much to be
discerned, unlearned,
felt. Felt as light as shelter-

feather, "hleów-feðer"
standing windward,
fanning protection.

In lee of passing storm, this past-
time. In lieu of the past imperfect
tense, this presence.

Wings are a hopeful thing.

Wings are a hopeful thing

**“the space of the empty jar
offers miracles of new unknowns”**

**-Penn Kemp,
“Hope the Thing”**



Cover Art by Ben O'Neil